

Comments on the proposed conservation of the specific name of *Anniella pulchra* Gray, 1852 and designation of a neotype (Reptilia, Squamata)

(Case 2552; see BZN 48: 316–318; 49: 155–156)

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I feel that I am in a unique position to judge the merits of the application by Drs Murphy & Smith and to urge the Commission to approve it. To change the current nomenclature of *Anniella* would cause certain confusion.

Dr Marc P. Hayes (*Portland State University*) and I have recently completed a four-year status report, *Special Concern Amphibians and Reptiles in California*. This document will be widely used by a number of state, federal and local agencies, as well as private consultants. We reviewed the taxonomy, distribution, life history and threats to the legless lizard, *Anniella pulchra*, throughout its known range in California. We found that of the 30 references we cited only one (Bury, 1985; an unpublished report) had adopted the nomenclature proposed by Hunt (1983). Furthermore, of 1,972 museum specimens we examined in 12 U.S. collections only 282 specimens in a single collection were catalogued under Hunt's arrangement. It is clear that nearly all curators and collections managers have resisted relabelling the specimens in their charge.

Information published by Bezy & Wright (1971) and Bezy, Gorman, Kim & Wright (1972) indicates that the taxon currently known as *A. pulchra* consists of at least two distinct taxa. Hopefully, future biochemical and morphological analyses will clarify the relationships of *Anniella* taxa in California. A revision of the group is inevitable and thus the conservation of *A. pulchra* by selection of a neotype is the best course of action.

Additional references

- Bezy, R. & Wright, J. 1971. Karyotypic variation and relationships of the California legless lizard, *Anniella pulchra* Gray (Reptilia, Anniellidae). *Herpetological Review*, 3(4): 71–72.
 Bezy, R., Gorman, G.C., Kim, Y.J. & Wright, J.W. 1972. Chromosomal and genetic divergence in the fossorial lizards of the family Anniellidae. *Systematic Zoology*, 26(1): 57–71.
 Bury, R.B. 1985 (unpublished). Status report: *Anniella pulchra nigra* Fischer, black legless lizard (Anniellidae: Sauria) in central California. Final report for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Endangered Species, Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.

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Despite the validity of the argument on priority, the nomenclature of *Anniella pulchra* Gray, 1852 should follow the pre-Hunt (1983) status because there is over a century of literature on this taxon which is both voluminous and very specific about the animal it addresses. Nomenclature ought to be stable and it therefore seems logical in this case to honour the spirit rather than the letter of the Code.

(3) Hugh Griffith

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I write in support of the application to retain the current usage of the name *Anniella pulchra* Gray, 1852.

I believe that the authors are correct in their assertion that the vast majority of herpetologists (systematists and otherwise) understand the widespread mainland California form to be *A. pulchra*. To follow Hunt (1983) and rename this species as a subspecies of *A. nigra* Fischer, 1885 would introduce significant confusion to a vast literature base for the sake of 'correcting' an error which arose from a complex series of events long ago.

I study burrowing lizards, including *Anniella*, and would find it awkward to adopt Hunt's nomenclature, as I am sure would others. I thus support the neotype designation and the other proposals of Murphy & Smith.

(4) Richard G. Zweifel

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The proposal by Murphy & Smith to designate a neotype and conserve the name *Anniella pulchra* Gray, 1852 has my full support. Promotion of stability of nomenclature is one of the important functions of the Commission and may appropriately be exercised in this case. The taxon has a large literature diverse in subject matter. Change would serve no useful purpose and would be confusing to ecologists and physiologists not likely to be informed regarding current nomenclature.